



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

April 19, 2006

The Honorable Bill Frist
Senate Majority Leader
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Frist:

Enrollment in the new Medicare prescription drug program is well underway. Across the country, over 40 million Medicare beneficiaries have been presented with the choice of signing up for the program. Unfortunately, many seniors and individuals with disabilities are understandably concerned and confused about the new benefit.

Medicare beneficiaries face a number of prescription drug plan options, and choosing the right plan can be a challenge. Each of the options differs in terms of premiums, cost-sharing requirements, drugs covered and pharmacy access. Sorting through these plans has proven to be difficult and time consuming. Further complicating matters, the Medicare drug program is experiencing a variety of implementation problems that have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable beneficiaries.

Yet, beneficiaries who do not act by the May 15, 2006, deadline and who enroll at a later date will face a financial penalty. Seniors who choose a plan after May 15, 2006, will be penalized by a one percent increase in their premium for each month they delay their choice.

Legislation has been introduced in the Senate which would expand the existing six-month open enrollment period to the entire year of 2006. By extending the enrollment deadline and delaying late enrollment penalties, we can make sure that our constituents are not forced to make hasty decisions about their health care. The stakes here are too high to deny seniors the time and resources they need to make an informed decision.

We all share the goal of ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have sufficient time and assistance to make a wise decision regarding prescription drug coverage. Extending the deadline for the new program is a small but important step that will help ease the transition to this new program. We urge you, as the Senate Majority Leader, to bring legislation extending the Medicare prescription deadline to the Senate floor as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Harry Reid

C. L. Chafe

Ed Kennedy

Jim F. Kerry

Blanche L. Linster

Ben Zelen

Allyson

Em Bayh

Mike DeWine

Allen Pfeiffer

Jay Rohrer

James M. Jeffords

Ron Wyden

Kent Beck

Jon Kyl

Chuck Schumer

Maria Carmichael

Mary L. Lander

Ken Salazar

Robert A. Neuharth

Robert M. Menendez

Byron L. Dorgan

Frank R. Lautenberg

Barbara Boxer

Rebbie Stebenow

Jack Rubin

Max Baer

Ed Johnson

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Chris Dodd

Bill Dera

Tom Harkin

Mark Dayton

Patty Murray

Carol Levin

Patrick Leahy

Joe Biden

Samuel Alito

Tim Feingold

Herb Kohl

Dianne Feinstein

Robert C. Byrd

Al Franken

Paul D. Sarbanes

Jack Reed

Tom Carper